

IDAHO VETERANS AFFAIRS COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES

January 10, 2008

Pursuant to agreement, a meeting of the Idaho Veterans Affairs Commission was held in the conference room at the Idaho State Veterans Home – Boise, Thursday, January 10, 2008, for the purpose of reviewing program reports and other items of business.

Present: Commissioner, Donald Riegel, Chairman
Commissioner, Ken Pitcher, Vice Chairman
Commissioner Frank Richardson
Commissioner Art Gimpel
Commissioner Barbara Thurlow
David Brasuell, Administrator, IDVS
Susan Lowman-Thomas, Human Resource Officer, IDVS
Debbie Spence, Financial Specialist Principal, IDVS
Jim Adams, Administrative Support Manager, IDVS
James Roberts, Administrator, IDVH – Boise
Clark Graebel, Administrator, IDVH – Lewiston
Tom Ressler, Office of Veterans Advocacy
Zach Rodriguez, Director, Veterans Cemetery
Tammy Hebdon, Administrative Assistant 2, IDVS

Chairman Don Riegel called the meeting to order at 8:30 a.m.

INTRODUCTION OF GUEST:

Bob Wells – Special Assistant for Uniformed Services & Administration, Governors Office
Officer Brad Korth, Idaho State Police
Mel Napier – Commissioner Elect, IVAC
Pat Teague – Veterans of Foreign Wars
Mike Grigsby - Military Order of Purple Heart
Patty Murphy – IDVS Public Relations Officer
Glenn O'Dell

APPROVAL OF THE OCTOBER 2007 IDAHO VETERANS AFFAIRS COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES:

Commissioner Frank Richardson moved that the Commission dispense with the reading of the October 2007 minutes and approve them as written. Commissioner Ken Pitcher seconded the motion; motion carried.

SWEARING IN OF NEW COMMISSIONER:

Commissioner Regal swore in Art Gimpel, our new Idaho Veterans Affairs Commission Commissioner from Eastern Idaho. Commissioner Gimpel accepted the oath of office and began his appointment.

COMMENTS FROM GUESTS:

Bob Wells, Governors Office, asked for a few minutes to address the commission. Bob informed the commission that Governor Otter is very passionate about veterans and veterans issues. As he watches the young men and women returning from war, Gov. Otter is proud of the services they will receive in Idaho, partly due to the wonderful staff at the Idaho Division of Veterans Services. Governor Otter totally supports the Division and has nothing but confidence in Dave Brasuell and his staff. Bob extended his thanks to the Division as well, stating that knowing the veterans are in good hands is a very welcome and comforting realization.

David Brasuell briefed Bob on the process of our Commission meetings and provided him with a copy of the reports distributed to all members, affirming the Divisions commitment to Governor Otters request for data-driven decision making.

Bob thanked Dave for the information, and reiterated how pleased the Governor is with the services being provided by the Division and for the way the staff carries out their duties. Bob added that at the moment one of the Governors main concerns at this time centers around the ratio of female veterans to male veterans. The Governor wants to make sure that as this is a fairly new issue, and as the number of female veterans is increasing, that these issues are all correctly and completely addressed. Governor Otter has complete confidence that the Division and the Commission will be able to accurately and completely address these issues.

Frank Richardson commented on the work that Gina Stamper, State Service Officer, is doing on the Women's Veterans Tri-State Conference that will be held in Oregon in April, 2008, showing the new focus on women's issues. Bob asked if it would be possible for someone to come and provide a 15 minute briefing to the Gov on this topic so that he can get his info first hand. Tom Ressler, Office of Veterans Advocacy, informed Bob and the Commission that Gina and the VA, along with Patti Murphy, IDVS Public Information Officer, are getting ready to do a widespread PR campaign to get the word out to the community. Bob Wells suggested that as this campaign kicks off IDVS should ask the Governor to issue a Proclamation for an Idaho Women's Veterans Day. Tom Ressler clarified that the 2008 Conference will be in Pendleton, Oregon, but that plans are in the works to hold the 2009 conference in Idaho. Bob asked for a one page synopsis on the conference and he will see about the possibility of having Mrs. Otter attend.

Commissioner Riegel introduced Mike Grigsby, who is now National Vice Commander Region 3 for MOPH. Under his jurisdiction, Mike now covers eight states –Idaho, Alaska, Washington, Oregon, Montana, North & South Dakota, and Wyoming, covering over 1.3 million square miles. Mike announced that until June 30, 2008, MOPH is extending their Diamond Jubilee 75th Anniversary Life Time membership for \$50.00. In addition, all Iraq/Afghanistan Purple Heart returnees are entitled to one year free membership.

Mike also informed the Commission that during a recent meeting in Anchorage, Alaska it was revealed that within two years there will be a new medical center in Fairbanks, providing Alaska with their second medical center.

Tom Ressler asked Mike if he knew when, or if, the MOPH National Officer Training would be returning. Mike said he would check on the status and get back to Tom with the updated information.

IDAHO DIVISION OF VETERANS SERVICES HUMAN RESOURCES:

Susan Lowman-Thomas provided the Commission with an update on the happenings within Human Resources.

To date, there are 275 classified employees, 72 exempt or temporary employees and four Board members. Turnover still appears to be less of a problem for the agency than for private industry. For 2007 the Division Office was at 9.71%, OVA 0%, Cemetery 28.6%, Boise Home 30.72%, Pocatello Home 17.94%, and Lewiston Home 17.94% (national average in homes is 65%+). Everyone is doing really well! A review of Exit Interview information reveals that most of our employees (27) have left to pursue better jobs. Compensation, the reason we usually associate with employees leaving, only accounts for a loss of three. Human Resource staff continues to conduct these interviews so that the Division can better address issues and shortfalls.

In the FY2008 Budget Address Governor Otter announced that he is proposing a 5% increase in personnel money. This does not mean that everyone will receive a 5% pay increase. The increase is to the entire personnel allotment, resulting in 5% more money that can be used to award pay increases and/or bonuses. Susan and her staff will begin working on the Change in Employee Compensation (CEC) and the changes will become effective July 1, 2008.

The updated Personnel Policies are almost completed. Susan informed the Commission that these policies have been updated based on new statewide policies and have been reviewed by the attorney general's office. The final version is expected to be completed in January 2008, and once they are released, training for all employees will begin.

Commissioner Richardson inquired about the article in the newspaper addressing the change in insurance benefits for state employees. Susan Lowman-Thomas replied that she had seen and reviewed the proposal from Mr. Gwartney, Director of Administration, and that it is a very fair and reasonable proposal, especially when compared to the private sector market. Dave Brasuell added that there will be some changes coming, especially for new employees, but that many would be grandfathered in, and may not be affected as harshly as first thought.

IDAHO DIVISION OF VETERANS SERVICES PUBLIC INFORMATION REPORT:

Patti Murphy, Public Information Office, has spent the past few months working on several projects to help educate the public about what IDVS is and what types of services they provide. To help accomplish this, Patti arranged a KIDO Radio interview for Zach Rodriguez to promote the Missing In

America Project, assisted David Brasuell with an Opinion Article in the Idaho Statesman that helped identify the contributions from veterans in Idaho, helped publicize the opening of the Visitors Center at the Idaho State Veterans Cemetery, developed an Unseen Injuries brochure that helps veterans and the public understand the Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) issue facing and affecting our new veterans, and has begun helping Gina Stamper, State Service Officer, with publicity for the upcoming Women's Veterans Conference. Many of these projects are on going, and many new ones are upcoming, so Patti will continue to assist the Division promote their various activities.

The re-vamping of the IDVS web page is another project that Patti has been busy working on. Currently, the text has been rewritten and the committee is preparing to write the specifications for the web developer. Plans are to try and have the new web page up and running by early fall 2008. Bob Wells inquired about the cost of the web page. Patti indicated she did not know the cost, and Jim Adams assisted by explaining the exact cost is unknown at this time. Because of State contracting rules, an RFP (request for proposal) must be created and advertised on the State web page, which will help generate feedback from potential providers. Once this is completed, the actual Bid Request can be developed and issued, and once the successful bidder is identified, exact costs can be established.

IDAHO DIVISION OF VETERANS SERVICES FINANCIAL REPORT:

Debbie Spence provided the Commission with an update on the financial position of IDVS. The Year to Date Per Diem average for Nursing is \$222.03, with an Occupancy Rate average of 86%. The Year to Date Per Diem average for Domiciliary is \$71.71, and the Occupancy Rate average is 97%.

As it is the time of the year for the presentation of the budget, Debbie provided the Commission with an overview of the budget request and breakdown:

Total Amount Requested	\$35,920,000
Nursing & Dietary Pay Increase (to move closer to pay line)	\$98,900
Capital Outlay (computers, household eqpt., etc)	\$171,600
Additional Cemetery (depends on ability to obtain land)	\$10,500,000
Medical & Contractual Inflation	\$169,900
Change Employee Compensation	5% total
General Inflation	0 – the Governor did not approve any general inflation

which is consistent with past practices

The total General Funds amounts to 5.19% of the total budget recommendation, which is down from the 8% General Funds last year.

The Division has also requested two supplemental budgets: Medicare Certification for \$836,400 and Moving/Relocating Division Headquarters \$123,800. Both of these will be presented before JFAC

within the next few days (possibly today), and Division should know quickly if they are approved or not.

Dave commented that Cathy Holland-Smith, Budget Supervisor, Legislative Services Office, came over and met with him and Debbie to review the budget. For every question asked, Debbie had a sufficient answer, providing Cathy with immediate information and confidence that the IDVS budget request is reasonable and accurate. Dave commended Debbie on the job she has done, and continues to do, to assure the Division stays within their budget and within the rules.

And with that, Dave, Debbie, and James Roberts, Boise Home Administrator, had to leave to go and present the supplemental budget requests to JFAC.

PRESENTATIONS TO COMMISSIONERS:

Commissioner Barb Thurlow and Commissioner Frank Richardson were attending their final meeting as Commissioners. In recognition of their service each was presented with a Certificate of Recognition and American flag that was flown over the Capital. The Commission thanked both Commissioners for all of the support, advice, comments and guidance they provided to the group, and invited them back any time they'd like to stop in.

QUESTION/ANSWER PERIOD ON THE VETERANS HOMES, THE OFFICE OF VETERANS ADVOCACY AND THE STATE VETERANS CEMETERY FY07 THIRD QUARTER OPERATIONS REPORTS:

Pocatello Veterans Home Operations Report:

Brent Schneider began his report by explaining the large October Medicaid payments. This vast increase is a direct result of the underpayments that Medicaid has been making over the past several months. After the "catch up" payments are received the monthly amounts should return to normal.

As in months past, the Pocatello Home is still struggling with their census. Although numbers remain low, they are not declining. Brent informed the Commission that although the Pocatello home does lose residents, they manage to admit new ones, so the numbers stay constant. It is the hope of the Pocatello staff that with the inception of Medicare services these numbers will begin to rise.

The Pocatello home is diligently working to secure a new Physical Therapy provider. This provider is necessary to meet the Medicare requirements, and the anticipated date to begin service is February 1, 2008.

During the past quarter there have been some staff changes at the Pocatello home. There is a new financial technician in the main office and one of her main duties will be the pharmacy billing; the Food Services Supervisor retired, but a replacement has been hired, and she comes to the Pocatello home with 12 years of nursing home food service experience, so this transition has progressed smoothly.

As mentioned at the July Commission Meeting, the Pocatello Home now has a new Housekeeping and Laundry contractor, Dea Clark. Dea was a former A-OK employee, so this transition has also gone smoothly. Brent reported that it is very nice to be able to deal one-on-one, on a daily basis if needed, with the owner. This change has resulted in a noticeable improvement in both cleaning and management relationship. As a result of the change over, it appears as though there were no laundry and housekeeping charges for the month of November. This is due to the fact that A-OK had been paid a month ahead, so the services they provided in November had actually been expensed in October.

Brent has often spoken about what an outstanding employee Jim, his maintenance foreman is, and how much money he saves the Pocatello home. To drive that point home, Brent informed the Commission that the Pocatello home recently purchased a new lawn tractor, and thanks to the outstanding upkeep and maintenance performed on the old machine, they were able to receive a \$3500 trade-in—and this was a 12 year old machine! In addition to that cost savings, Dale Clayton, the maintenance assistant, was able to replace a part on a control panel for \$8.50, when the lowest price quote received from vendors was \$500.

Over the next few months there are several maintenance projects planned: carpeting replacement on the East and West wings, kitchen floor replacement, resurfacing of the parking lot, doubling the size of the chapel by expanding it 25 feet, and replacement of an antiquated, hard to locate parts, nurses call system.

During the month of December the Chubbuck Wal-Mart Store, managed by Mr. Gary Black, donated \$5000 to the Pocatello Veterans Home, to be used for whatever it was the residents wanted/needed. Brent and Carey Hebdon went shopping and spent \$1700 on items the residents requested, then used the balance to purchase a 47" flat screen television for the day area. When the television was mounted on the wall all of the Wal-Mart employees who made the donation possible came to the Pocatello home and dedicated the television. As a result of the generosity, the Wal-Mart store received a national award. Brent was quick to point out that although this was a wonderful donation, it is not the only one they have received from Wal-Mart—they are always there to help the veterans when they need help.

The Pocatello Home nursing hours increased a small amount during the third quarter. This is most likely due to the fact that since most of the employees are classified, Brent does not have the option to send them home when the census is low; instead, the Pocatello home opts to not fill shifts when employees call in sick or take days off. By not filling empty shifts, nursing hours are decreased, helping to keep them within the expectation. Along those same lines, Brent reports that the use of Agency was down to zero this past quarter, a direct result of taking one position and splitting it between two necessary part-time employees. This change has allowed for better coverage and less unnecessary hours.

Turnover at the Pocatello Home remains low, an indication that employees are happy with their job and plan to stay. For those who have left, exit interviews have revealed the reasons to be retirement or returning to school, with very few indicating pay or dissatisfaction.

In November Brent attended a meeting at the Idaho Falls VFW, where the National President of the VFW Auxiliary was visiting. During the meeting Brent gave a report on the Pocatello Home, and all of the wonderful support the VFW and the VFW Auxiliary provide.

Commissioner Richardson commented that the \$5000 that did not have to be paid for housekeeping and laundry during the month of November should have been included in the Cost Saving section of the report. Brent agreed, and apologized for the omission.

Lewiston Veterans Home Operations Report:

Clark Graebel reported that the Lewiston Home saw a large increase in revenue as a result of finally receiving payment of the back-billing from Medicare D. He further added that because of Medicare D, the income at the Lewiston Home has almost doubled.

Maintenance projects at the Lewiston Home continue to be a problem. The Physical Therapy room that was to have been completed by October 16, 2007 is still not completed. This project seems to be plagued with “one step forward, several steps back”. For example, the contractor received the new fire box and when he opened it and began the installation, only half of the parts were there-consequently it did not get installed. The OVA office is completed, but the architect won’t allow occupancy until the final inspection is completed and passed, and this has been delayed because it was discovered there were no air ducts of any kind installed, so a change order had to be obtained and the air ducts had to be installed.

For three years running Clark has been able to maintain the Lewiston Home without use of Agency hours. This trend continues, and Clark reports that his nursing hours range between 2.83 – 2.89. The Lewiston Home currently has several temporary employees, which affords Clark the ability to send employees home or not have them come in at all, both of which contribute to the reduced nursing hours.

On November 12, 2007 – Veterans Day – the Lewiston Home held a ceremony to honor their veterans and to unveil the “I Am An American” statue. This ceremony was very well attended, with over 600 in attendance. Zach Rodriguez, Cemetery Director, commented that, upon returning to Boise, the Honors Group that attended reported that it was very difficult to keep a dry eye – it was that touching. Commissioner Riegel wanted to know if the statue was generating any interest in the Lewiston Home, or were people just driving by to see the statue. Clark reported that there has been an increase in interest and that 14 tours were given over the past few weeks.

The Lewiston IVAL group donated a second Hi/Low bed to the home, and six others have been donated as well. Clark anticipates an additional bed donation from the Rotary Club.

Boise Veterans Home Operations Report:

James Roberts had to leave the Commission meeting to attend the Supplemental Budget Hearings at JFAC, so his Administrator In Training, Sarah Yoder filled in and reported.

Overall the Boise Home is doing well. October receipts appear to be high, as the Boise Home received a large back-billing payment from Medicaid. The census is remaining steady at about 93%; however, there was a small dip in November, allowing the admittance of a veterans spouse. Pharmacy receipts appear to be down, which is most likely due to a change in office staff. Additionally the Boise Home does not currently have a lot of residents with Medicare Part D, and those who do have Medicare Part D have several unpaid claims are being re-billed.

The Boise Home has been busy with several new DPW (Dept of Public Works) projects; some have been completed, some are yet to come. One of the most significant completions has been the addition of the new Maintenance Shop. This shop has provided the maintenance staff with an expanded, enclosed work area, which will result in more projects been completed in-house, reducing cost and time. In addition to the DPW projects the Boise Home has installed twelve new activity boards to display pictures of activities the residents participate in, have made the front parking area a one-way and installed speed bumps, and have replaced several damaged floor tiles. With these changes, and all of the upcoming projects, the Boise Home continues to be a safe and comfortable place for our veterans to reside.

During the month of November the Boise Home had a Life Safety Survey, where six deficiencies were identified. A Plan of Correction to remedy these concerns has been submitted. Additionally, the VAMC conducted a survey, with no care issues identified. There is a concern about the VAMC holding the Boise Home to a JAYCO standard, but since the home is not a JAYCO facility this is something that should not happen, and both sides are working to rectify the issue.

Sarah reported that the Boise Home has hired a new Staff Development and Staff Coordinator, which has resulted in a decrease in the use of agency hours.

Commissioner Richardson informed the Commission that the company his son works for, Interior Systems Incorporated, raised \$4000 that was donated to the Boise IVAL to use however they wanted. Phil Hawkins used the money to purchase three lift chairs and a coffee table for the East wing. Reports from nurses and staff are all positive, indicating these additions have made their jobs easier. The American Legion, Post 2 will be issuing the company a Certificate of Appreciation, as will the State of Idaho. IDVS also issued them a Certificate of Appreciation. Frank points out the importance of recognizing these donations as they are very important and often times crucial to getting things accomplished.

Idaho State Veterans Cemetery Operations Report:

Zach Rodriguez provided the Commission with a graph comparing internments from 2005 through 2008 (see attached graph), indicating that internments appear to be on a steady increase. Along those same lines, Zach informed the Commission that national legislation HR797-extending the time frame for filing for plot allowances – appears to be on its way to passage. Once passed, this will allow the Cemetery to bill for plot allowances as far back as October 2006, thus greatly increasing revenue. The staff at the Cemetery is compiling the list of those who qualify for this billing and will be ready to submit the requests once the legislation is passed.

Both the Missing in America and the Wreaths Across America programs were held during the past quarter. Both ceremonies were well attended, and had media coverage. These programs will be ongoing, yearly programs, and Zach asked for comments/suggestions of ways to improve the process.

On Friday, January 11, 2008, Zach will be conducting a tour of the Cemetery for eight members of the Washington State Governess Committee, Cemetery Board from Medicine Lake. This tour is designed to show them how the Cemetery works, allow them to ask questions about operations and get a general feel for what it takes to maintain the Cemetery. This is the group that will be responsible for establishing and maintaining the new Washington State Cemetery, so this information will be very useful for them. Commissioner Riegel has been asked by the Governess to attend, so he will accompany the group. Once the tour is completed the group will gather at VFW Post 63 for lunch before returning home.

Several projects at the Cemetery are completed and winding down. The new security system has been installed and is operational; they are just waiting to receive the users manuals. This system will allow Zach to view the Cemetery from remote locations (i.e. his home computer) and know what is happening at any time. The Visitors Center appears to be at a standstill. Although it is almost completed, there are a few items on the punch list that need to be completed, but Zach is having problems getting the contractor to do so. Commissioner Thurlow suggested Zach look over the fine print on the contract and see if there is a clause that would allow him to hire a new contractor to finish the punch list and then bill the original contractor for the cost. Zach said he would check on that option. Jim Adams pointed out that this is a Public Works contract and everything has to go through them, so that may not be a feasible solution. Zach will contact Public Works and see what can be done.

The Nampa and Caldwell Elks Lodges came together and donated three propane patio heaters to the Cemetery, which have been greatly appreciated. The Honor Guards are now able to keep warm while they are waiting, as are families and guests. The heaters were used during the Wreaths Across America ceremony, and the guest greatly appreciated them.

A staffing change has taken place at the Cemetery. Nikki Wilkins, who used to be at the Office of Veterans Advocacy, is now working as the front desk receptionist. Nikki brings a wealth of customer service skills that will allow her to assist the families when they come in and provide them a soothing, calm, welcoming atmosphere. Nikki is catching on quickly, and fitting in nicely. Everyone seems to be very happy with the change.

Plans are still progressing for the additional Cemetery. Due to weather and road conditions most of the correspondence is taking place by phone and email, but as soon as the weather improves Zach will travel to Eastern Idaho and begin face-to-face meetings again. The biggest hurdle still facing the additional cemetery is land—until land is obtain nothing else can be done. The FY09 Budget Proposal contains \$10,500,000 for the cemetery, but that funding is all contingent on obtaining the land.

Commissioner Richardson asked Zach to do a feasibility study to assess the possibility, and cost, to add a plexi-glass enclosure around the end of the Committal Shelter. Several people have approached

Commissioner Richardson and complained about the wind in that area, and asked if something could be done to block it. Zach said he would check into this and see what could be done.

Office of Veterans Advocacy Operations Report:

During the month of December the VA did not hold any hearings. Tom explained that the hearing officers make their own schedules and it appears as though they didn't want to do hearing in December. However, both November and January schedules were increased, so it appears they are making up the difference. Tom also reported that the number of appeals appears to be dropping. This is most likely a direct result of the diligence of the Service Officers to make sure the veterans fully understands the claim and is aware of the likely outcome of the appeal. OVA Service Officers cannot refuse to file claims, but they do make sure the veteran has all the information and facts, and understands the likelihood of success before they file their claim. This counseling helps identify reality and better prepares the veteran for the outcome.

The Emergency Grant fund has been well used over the past quarter. Tom reports that funds for the Boise area have been depleted, but Lewiston and Pocatello still have available funds. However, on February 1st all funds become available for all three areas, so Boise will have access to funding. During the month of December there were ten denials, with the main reason being residency status. Dave Brasuell asked Tom if he thought the budget request for this program needed to be increased. Tom responded that he felt the funding level was adequate, and since this is only the second year since the last increase, that it would be fine to leave it at the \$30,000 amount.

Tom added that sometimes the Emergency Grant money is not an option because the veteran does not meet the requirements. When this happens Tom can often times refer them to the Veterans Helping Veterans program. This program is funded by veterans at the Boise Home who collect and sell pop cans, sell poppies, and various other fund raising opportunities. Through this fund Tom has been able to help a local family, and just before Christmas a group of the men from the Boise Home took money down to the Boise Mission and handed it out. This money does not come from the state—it is solely obtained through efforts extended by the veterans at the Boise Home. This program reiterates the kindness, compassion and camaraderie our veterans have for one another.

In the training areas Tom reports that all of the service officers are doing well. Each service officer is required to take the mandatory accreditation testing, and all have passed the test the first time through. The annual county service officer training put on by the service offices is also about to begin. Rocky Davis, Lewiston Service Officer, has scheduled training with the North Idaho county service officers for March/April, and the others will be setting their dates soon. Once again this year the annual training for both state and county service officers, hosted by the OVA, will be held in Boise at the Double Tree, between the VFW National Conference and the American Legion Convention. The St. Louis Records Management Center will be attending and providing a presentation on what they do and how it gets done.

As mentioned earlier, Gina Stamper, State Service Officer, is working on the first Women's Veterans Conference, to be held in Pendleton, Oregon, in April 18 & 19, 2008. Idaho has been asked to sponsor one of the lunches. In order to do this, Gina needs to obtain \$3500-\$5000-this would cover the cost of

the meal and a small token/trinket from the State of Idaho. Corporate donations are been solicited, and beginning to come in, but donations from veterans organizations would also be appreciated.

Tom and Dave Brasuell went and met with the new VAMC Director, Dwayne Hamlin. Both are very excited about this change and have already seen changes and improvements. For example, there were several “out of town emergency doctors visits” claims veterans have submitted that should have been paid under the Millennium Act, but had been denied and needed to be reviewed. Dwayne has gone through several of them and they have now been paid. Another proposed change he is considering is Fee-Based services, which would allow distant area veterans to obtain medical care in their local community instead of having to travel long distances to VAMC. Dwayne comes to Boise with a background in Traumatic Brain Injury and engineering. As the new regional VA building is preparing to go out to bid, this engineering background will come in handy.

Commissioner Pitcher asked how the Outreach Program was going. Tom indicated it was going well, and also informed the Commission that he is planning to ride along with each Service Officer over the next year so that he can have firsthand knowledge of the issues concerning veterans. Additionally, the Caldwell CBOC will be putting a service officer on sight, one day per month (for starters) and it will always be the same day (i.e. third Wednesday of the month). The amount of time spent will depend on demand and use. Clark reported that due to snow and bad roads the Lewiston Service Officers did not make their scheduled trip to North Idaho. Once conditions improve they will reschedule. Tom reiterated that it will always be SAFETY FIRST, so if roads are bad, they will not travel.

Tom asked everyone who stops by the OVA office to welcome the new administrative assistant, Rebecca Cotterell, who replaced Nikki. Rebecca, who has spent many years living in China, teaching English, comes to the OVA with a vast pool of knowledge and skills and will be a wonderful addition to the staff.

Division of Veterans Services Operations Report:

Dave Brasuell had to leave and go attend the Supplemental Budget Hearing in front of JFAC. The IDVS Supplemental for Medicaid and the Supplemental for relocating the Division office are both being presented and voted on today. Jim Adams, Administrative Support Manager, addressed the Commission on Dave’s behalf.

As Tom mentioned, Dave met with Dwayne Hamlin, VAMC last week. Dave was very pleased and encouraged with the meeting, and plans to continue strengthening the relationship between the VAMC and IDVS.

The Division has been working on several informational pamphlets that are about ready to be printed, and then disbursed to the public. The brochures address Unseen Injuries (TBI, PTSD), Veterans Benefits and Idaho Medal of Honor Recipients. Zach is working on a brochure that better defines burial and cemetery benefits. If there are any other brochures that need to be published, please let Jim know and he will see that it gets created.

Over the past few weeks Dave and Jim have meet with some of the State legislators and discussed veterans concerns. Sen. Kate Kelly and Rep. LeFavour both visited with Dave and Jim and informed them they are concerned about some of the new veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan falling through the cracks. Both asked what Dave and Jim thought they could do to help assure this doesn't happen, and promised to assist in any way they can.

Dave, Debbie and James returned from the JFAC hearing and happily reported that both supplemental budgets were approved.

Dave took over and updated the Commission on happenings within Division and at the Boise Home. As everyone knows, both the Boise Home and the Pocatello Home have become Medicare approved, and will soon begin accepting Medicare residents. This change should have a positive effect on revenue in the upcoming year.

Dave also met with Greg Johnson from DPW and discussed the ongoing and upcoming projects within the Division. As a result of this meeting some of the Boise Home projects were combined, allowing a more even distribution of funding and also allowing some of the projects that were in need of additional money get completed.

The proposal for the computerized system that will help track and tally ancillary costs, and improve accountability within some of the programs is currently at the Attorney Generals office for review. Once the review is completed the proposal will be sent out for bids, and implemented once the bid has been awarded. Several other states are using this type of system and report that the initial setup costs were recouped in 6-9 months. This change will be a welcome change and should greatly help increase revenues for the three homes.

Social Worker Oni Kinberg (Boise Home) and State Service Officer, Steve Teague attended a meeting with the VA and Health & Welfare to discuss the mental health and TBI issues surrounding veterans. It was reported that both agencies are dropping the ball on these services and this meeting was to isolate the gaps and try to identify some viable solutions. Tom commented that he was sorry to hear that the Boise VAMC was taking a beating on this issue as they are doing an excellent job to help our veterans in every way possible, including retraining. Health & Welfare, however, has challenges in providing service in this area. This will be an ongoing discussion and more information will be provided in the future.

Dave was approached by the VA to consider the possibility of IDVS providing Adult Day Care and Respite Care – a much needed service. This is an option that is being explored, with the biggest concern being funding. However, with the approval of the supplemental budget to relocate Division and build a permanent building, Dave will explore the possibility of including an area that these services could be provided from. This is a very new subject and will require more investigation.

In a Milestone move, Governor Otter signed the Executive Order that states the POW/MIA flag will fly over all state buildings, 24/7, 365 days per year. All state agencies have received a letter explaining how the flag should be displayed, and all veterans organizations received a letter asking them to stop in to state agencies and see if they could assist in getting the flags flown, and possible donate a flag. Jim Adams has received calls from several agencies concerning this issue and has been able to explain the

process and direct them as to where to obtain a flag. This Executive Order was effective October 24, 2007.

Dave turned the floor over to Jim Adams so he could update the Commission on the legislation currently being discussed during this legislative session.

Jim began by informing the Commission that DPW has been told they will receive an additional \$35 million for alterations/repairs this fiscal year (FY09). As a result, IDVS will probably receive funding for needed projects. Program executives need to start identifying needed projects.

The Divisions FY2009 budget request includes \$1 million dollars to build a new, permanent building for the Division headquarters. The only confinement Governor Otter put on this construction is that the building MUST remain on the IDVH grounds. The area located around the rose garden is one that is being considered, with the front of the building facing Collins Road.

The legislation proposed by IDVS and approved by the Governor asks for a check off box to be added to the Idaho State Individual Income Tax Return form, allowing tax payers to donate an amount of their choice to the IDVS. This money will be deposited into an Administrators fund at the state treasurer's office, will be disbursed at the discretion of the Administrator and will be used to support the IDVS mission. It is anticipated that this will pass without any problems. Unfortunately, the proposed \$500 tax credit for veteran's retirement pay that IDVS was proposing was killed by the Governor, so it will not be proposed this year.

Veteran's benefits are another topic that Dave and Jim are working on. It is well know that Idaho does not provide many benefits for our veterans, which needs to change. Plans are in the works to try and change this, but it will take time and patience, and will require proving to the legislature that Idaho is lacking, and showing them what other states provide. This will be an on-going task.

Jim concluded by updating the Commission on a law the United States President signed into law on December 22, 2006, concerning payment for veterans who are 70-100% disabled and living in long-term care facilities. Under this law, these services were supposed to be paid at 100%; however that is not happening. Currently, the veterans residing in our three veterans homes are only receiving the standard per diem rate. Jim is working on getting this issue resolved and corrected and Dwayne Hamlin, the new VAMC Director, has promised that he will research this, see what he can find out, and will report back to Dave.

OLD BUSINESS:

Commissioner Thurlow made a motion to appoint the Division Administrator as the Executive Secretary for the Commission, for a term to coincide with the appointment as Administrator of IDVS. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Richardson. A vote was held and unanimously approved the appointment.

Mike Grigsby told the Commission that he will be going to Washington, DC March 11-16, 2008 to meet with legislators, so if anyone has something they would like him to discuss to please let him know.

A 2008 calendar of events, listing regional, state and national conventions, was handed out to all Commission members. Jim told the Commission if there was anything that needed to be added to please let Tammy know and she would update and redistribute. It was noted that location for the VFW State Convention, June 22-25, 2008, needed to be changed to Worley, Idaho.

NEW BUSINESS:

A guest, Mr. Glenn Odell, asked to address the Commission concerning two issues. The Commission granted his request. Mr. Odell's first concerns centers around the validity of claims by an Idaho State employee about receipt of medals. His second concern revolved around the Veterans Preference law, which he feels needs to be clarified, and that the enforcement of the law needs to be under the supervision of the Department of Labor. The Commission advised Mr. Odell that they would consider his comments and take action they deemed necessary.

Commissioner Pitcher reminded everyone about the Legislative Reception being held this evening at 5:00 pm, at the Owyhee Plaza, and encouraged everyone to attend.

Next Meeting:

The next IVAC Meeting will be held April 10, 2008, in Boise, at the Idaho State Veterans Home.

As there was no further business, Commissioner Gimpel moved that the meeting be adjourned; Commissioner Richardson seconded the motion.

Meeting was adjourned at 12:00 p.m.

Don Riegel, Chairman

David Brasuell, Executive Secretary